



MICHIGAN PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA

A member Chapter of Paralyzed Veterans of America

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**STATEMENT OF MICHAEL HARRIS
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MICHIGAN PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA**

**BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND
URBAN POLICY**

**CONCERNING
HOUSE BILL 4138 (THE INCLUSIVE HOME DESIGN ACT)**



MARCH 15, 2006

OUR MISSION

The mission of Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America is to enhance the lives of veterans with spinal cord injury or disease as well as all citizens with disabilities, by advocating for civil rights, assuring quality health care, supporting continued research and education, and encouraging independence and healthy living through various health, sports and recreational programs. MPVA shall continue striving to remain at the forefront of both veterans' benefits services and disability rights, while working toward a better quality of life for all American citizens.

Mr. Chairman, and fellow members of the Local Government and Urban Policy Committee, it is an honor for me to be here today to present testimony on House Bill 4138 (The Inclusive Home Design Act) which incorporates basic accessibility improvements into the new construction of single-family homes built with state funding.

I'm Michael Harris, Deputy Executive Director for the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America, or MPVA. MPVA is one of the numerous chapters of the Washington, D.C.-based Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA). PVA is a congressionally chartered veterans service organization with over 20,000 members. Our members are honorably discharged veterans of the United States Armed Services who have incurred spinal cord injury or disease resulting in paralysis requiring the use of a wheelchair for mobility.

House Bill 4138 would require 50% of newly-built single family homes receiving state funds from the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) to meet the following standards:

- Include at least one accessible, or "zero step" entrance into the home.
- Ensure all doorways on the main floor have a minimum of 32 inches of clear passage space.
- Build at least one wheelchair accessible bathroom on the main floor.
- Place electrical and climate controls (such as light switches and thermostats) at reachable heights.

The proposed legislation is based on the concept of Visitability. Visitability is associated with the movement for affordable, sustainable and inclusive design approach for integrating basic accessibility features into all newly built homes and housing. For example, in Georgia "Concrete Change" promotes visitability as a project of the Statewide Independent Living Council of Georgia which encourages builders, contractors, realtors, architects, community development groups and others to commit to Visitability standards.

Visitability improves access for all people, not only people with disabilities. For example, it allows Seniors to age in place, and it makes movement into and out of the home more manageable for parents with children and baby strollers.

The Visitability concept is gaining momentum in states and municipalities around the country. These communities realize that when we make homes accessible, it benefits not only today's disability community, but also all of us who are friends and family members of people with disabilities, and it will benefit all of us as we grow old and acquire a disability.

Visitability features are basic accessibility design concepts that are inexpensive to implement at the initial period of design and construction. Evidence suggests that when visitable units are planned for at the outset, costs are minimal. In researching the costs associated with visitability, Concrete Change found that as little as \$200 is needed to provide basic access.

The spirit of visitability is as important as its features and benefits. It sends a powerful message that our state and municipalities will embrace people with disabilities with open arms by ensuring that barriers that prohibit them from visiting their family, friends and colleagues will no longer be tolerated. In essence, it's about creating a home where the welcome mat truly welcomes everyone.

MPVA is supportive of any legislation that allows veterans with mobility impairments the ability to live in their communities independently without having to encounter any architectural barriers.

Therefore, MPVA urges that the Local Government & Urban Policy committee to recommend the passage of historic legislation that will assure that our state housing dollars will be used in the most cost effective manner, while ending the practice of excluding entire segments of our population.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to express my views on behalf of the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America. I would be happy to answer any questions that you might have.



VISITABILITY

An approach to Universal
Design in Housing

PVA Resolution 98-A-26

- Be It Resolved, that legislation already adopted in the United Kingdom, State of Georgia and elsewhere be utilized by PVA staff to develop guidelines which PVA chapters may use in promoting the concepts of "visitability" in newly constructed housing

A Visitable home has:

- 1 zero-step entrance on accessible path
- 32 inch clear doorways thruout floor plan
- Basic access to – at minimum – half bath on main floor

Why Visitability?

- Fair Housing Accessibility Guidelines ≠ Single Family Homes & Townhouses
- ADA Accessibility Guidelines ≠ Privately-funded Single Family Homes & Townhouses

Value of visitability

- allows greater integration of people with disabilities in communities
- enables people with disabilities to go to homes of friends, families, colleagues
- homes built on a visit-able floor plan are easier to adapt to full accessibility when needed

Costs

- No step entrance, 36 inch doors, accessible powder room add less than 3 to 5% to overall average cost of a single family home –
- Compare to costs of injuries associated with falls -- \$16,400
- Compare to annual cost of nursing home care

State and local "Visitability" laws and ordinances

- Texas, Georgia, Vermont, Kansas, Oregon, Minnesota
- Atlanta, GA, Austin, TX, Urbana, IL, Pima Co., AZ, Naperville, IL

How to Get Involved

- Project H.E.R.O. – Homes Eliminated of Restrictions and Obstacles -
- Roll out in DC on May 11th –program of International Code Council Foundation partnering with AIA, AIBD, DAV, and PVA –www.ProjectHERO.info

How to Get Involved

- Easy Living Home – www.easylivinghome.org
- 480 homes certified in Georgia
- Georgia, West Virginia, Texas and New Hampshire

How to Get Involved

- Concrete Change
- www.concretechange.org